

Zebulon Pike and American Popular Culture — or — Has Pike Peaked?



by Michael L. Olsen

With his death at the Battle of York in 1813, Brigadier General Zebulon Montgomery Pike entered the pantheon of genuine American military heroes. As with many of those heroes, however, his heritage and his exploits largely have been forgotten. Had Pikes Peak, heralded today in Colorado as “America’s Mountain,” not been named for him, he might be as little remembered as General James Miller, Commodore Joshua Barney, or Captain Lewis Warrington, and other heroes of the War of 1812.¹

Even when Americans do remember Pike, they have mistaken impressions of his achievements. He did not discover the source of the Mississippi River, although he came close, and his journey to Leech

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1. All of the preliminary research for this article, and much of the subsequent development of that research, was conducted via the Internet. In fact, before the advent of this modern intelligence network, an analysis of Pike’s place in American culture would have been difficult and expensive, and have taken years to complete. Now, with the stroke of a key, every entry concerning Pike in the Library of Congress can be noted, and memorials to Pike as far-flung as Toronto, the San Luis Valley of Colorado, and southern Louisiana can be viewed and visited. Ten U.S. counties named for Pike all have Web sites. Even the minutes of the November 17, 2003, meeting of the Board of Trustees of Sackets Harbor, New York, concerning current investigations into the location of Zebulon Pike’s grave can be accessed online. All such URL citations were current as of March 15, 2006.

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THE PERSHING TRANSPORT ROUTE

PIKES PEAK

Ocean to Ocean

HIGHWAY

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Among the many aspects of popular culture that drew upon the Pike mystique was the Pikes Peak Ocean to Ocean Highway, a transcontinental road that developed around 1912. This road stretched east-west across northern Kansas, following what is now Highway U.S. 36. (Facing page) Memorial to Pike at the Historic Arkansas Riverwalk, Pike Plaza, Pueblo, Colorado.

Lake, Minnesota, in the winter of 1805–1806 is a saga of endurance against great odds. Nor did he climb Pikes Peak, although he made a valiant effort to do so. His Southwest Expedition in 1806–1807 should be known as one of the most arduous yet productive in the annals of American exploration, but even at the time it was overshadowed by the feats of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, as it has been again recently during the bicentennial celebration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

On the other hand, most histories of American expansion, especially collections issued periodically touting “America’s great explorers,” do include accounts of Pike, his men, and their sufferings. These accounts most often cover his search for the sources of the Arkansas and Red Rivers. Pike’s involvement in the schemes of Aaron Burr and General James Wilkinson also receives periodic attention, particularly among academic historians.

As might be expected, Americans have eulogized and commemorated Pike most frequently in the quarter century after his death, both in connection with memories of the War of 1812 and during the patriotic fervor surrounding the Mexican War in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Somewhat ironically, but understandably, he was entirely forgotten in the decades following the Civil War. Americans then had other heroes and preoccupations. With the approach of the 1906 centennial of his Southwest Expedition, Pike was once more remembered with celebratory festivals, new monuments, and a variety of memorabilia. Two of the four novels based on his western explorations also appeared at this time.²

During the remainder of the twentieth century an occasional historic site, or a new dam on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, or a state park in Iowa, would be dedicated to the memory of Pike and his deeds. The city of Colorado Springs, Colorado, in the shadow of Pikes Peak, celebrated the sesquicentennial of his western journey in 1956, although not as lavishly as it had for his 1906 centennial. It is interesting that Pike has lived on most notably in the pages of juvenile literature. Many of these books present his boyhood and youth in somewhat fanciful detail and hold him up as an example to be emulated.

2. Pike novels are discussed and cited later in this article. The Kansas celebration of 1906 received extensive coverage in “One Hundred years Under the Flag. The Centennial Celebration of Pike’s Pawnee Village,” *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1907–1908 10 (1908): 15–159. See also Amanda Laugesen, “Making a Unique Heritage: Historical Celebrations in Kansas, 1900–1918,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 21 (Winter 1998–1999): 234–55.

Now that two hundred years have passed since Pike ascended to his place in American history, and given the relatively checkered career of his heritage, has Pike’s reputation peaked? If so, when was it at full tide and when did it begin to ebb? Must it now be said of Pike, as expressed in the well-known words of a popular World War I song immortalized by General Douglas MacArthur, “old soldiers never die; they only fade away?”³

Pike’s most enduring legacy perhaps rests in the places named for him in the land that was becoming America. Between 1814 and 1833 the residents of no fewer than sixteen counties and towns chose to call themselves after the hero of the Battle of York. His name, for two decades at least, readily came to mind as Americans moved west. Counties named for Pike march chronologically and geographically west from the Appalachians to the Mississippi: Pennsylvania (1814); Mississippi and Ohio (1815); Indiana (1817); Missouri (1818); Alabama, Illinois, and Kentucky (1821); Georgia (1822); and Arkansas (1833).

Towns named for Pike today range in size from mere hamlets to prosperous county seats. Some of them are Piketon, Ohio (1815); Zebulon, Kentucky (1821); Pikeville, Kentucky (1821); Zebulon, Georgia (1822); and Pikeville, Tennessee (1830). The town fathers of present Murfreesboro, the seat of Pike County, Arkansas, named their town “Zebulon” in 1833 but then changed the name in 1836. Zebulon, Georgia, also is the seat of that state’s Pike County. A state historical marker there reads, “It was named for Zebulon Montgomery Pike (1779–1813), leader, in 1805 of an expedition to trace the Mississippi River to its source. Later he explored the interior of Louisiana. Made Brig. Gen. in 1813, he was killed at Toronto, Canada, while commanding American forces there.” Names can be deceiving, however. Neither of the towns of Zebulon nor Pikeville—both in North Carolina—was named for Zebulon Pike.⁴

Steamboats were another quintessentially nineteenth-century phenomenon linked to the westward expansion of the United States. And here too, the public amply commemorated Pike in the decades immediately following his death. In fact, it is claimed that the *Zebulon Pike* was the first steamboat to dock in St. Louis, in 1817.

3. E. D. Hirsch, et al., eds., *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 3d ed., 2002, accessed at www.bartleby.com/59/3/oldsoldiersn.html. General MacArthur paraphrased the lyrics in his famous speech to a joint session of Congress on April 19, 1951.

4. As noted, many of these entities maintain Web sites. For Murfreesboro history, see www.rootsweb.com/~arpcahs/pikehistory.htm. For the Pike County, Georgia, historical marker, see www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/courthouses/pikeCH.htm.



Pike's most enduring legacy perhaps rests in the places named for him, for example Pike County, Missouri. Between 1814 and 1833 the residents of no fewer than sixteen U.S. counties and towns chose to call themselves after the hero of the Battle of York.

Built at the Fulton shipyard in Cincinnati, it also was the first western steamboat designed for passenger service. Subsequently at least half a dozen boats bearing the name *Pike* or *General Pike* plied the Ohio and the Mississippi.

The first vessel named for Pike, however, was a United States warship constructed by the New York shipbuilder Henry Eckford at Sackets Harbor, New York. Eckford began building her on April 9, 1813, just weeks before Pike's death. She was launched on June 12, 1813, having survived a fire during a British foray on the town. She served in various engagements on Lake Ontario, most notably against the *Royal George*. Laid up at Sackets Harbor at the end of the war, she was sold in 1825. Today, somewhat fittingly since Pike was a career army officer, the only ship bearing his name is the LT 805 *General Zebulon Pike*, a United States Army *Greene* class large coastal tugboat launched in 1994.⁵

Pike received other typical nineteenth-century accolades in addition to counties, towns, and steamboats adopting his name. Still extant are at least one "mourning memo-

rial," a monody eulogizing him, and a raft of hagiographic biographies.

The "mourning memorial" is a watercolor painting in the classic style of the time. It depicts two women dressed in black pining at a grave marker. A weeping willow tree overhangs the tombstone, and an angel hovers in the distance holding a banner that reads, "Wreaths of laurel over his tomb entwine." This piece was painted sometime between 1813 and 1825.⁶

Nathaniel Hill Wright published an early poem eulogizing Pike in 1814. Entitled "Monody, on the Death of Brigadier-General Zebulon Montgomery Pike: Who Fell at the Battle of York, Upper Canada, April 27, 1813," it was republished with a collection of Wright's works, *The Fall of Palmyra: and Other Poems*, in 1817. Like "mourning memorials," monodies were a popular form of collective grieving for public figures. The term itself is both literary and musical. It can be applied to an ode spoken by a single actor in ancient Greek drama, to a piece of music with a single melodic line, or to a poem in which a "speaker" mourns a death. Nathaniel Wright, a New Hampshire native and Dartmouth College graduate, practiced law in Hamilton

5. For steamboats, see the Lewis and Clark Journey of Discovery Web site at <http://www.nps.gov/jeff/LewisClark2/Circa1804/WestwardExpansion/EarlyExplorers/ZebulonPike.htm>; <http://members.tripod.com/~Write4801/riverboats/p.html>. For the warship *General Pike*, see *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Department of the Navy Web site at www.hazegray.org/danfs/sail/gen_pike.htm. For information about the army's tugboat, see www.hazegray.org/worldnav/usa/army.htm.

6. www.p4a.com/itemssummary/93747.htm.

County, Ohio, and was “one of a club of young men of literary proclivities, who contributed articles to the newspapers of Cincinnati.”⁷

Wright himself is the speaker in his monody, which he dedicated to Pike’s widow, Clarissa. In an introduction, he wrote, “I am aware that an apology is due for my presumption, in dedicating to you, without permission, this feeble tribute to the memory and virtues of your departed husband.” He further set the laudatory and somber tone of the poem by noting, again in his introduction,

The memory of a hero is always dear to his countrymen—and the recollection of the exulted principles of honor, the undaunted heroism, and the milder virtues, which shone forth in their native lustre [*sic*], in the character of General Pike—will ever be cherished by a grateful people. The tears of a nation spring afresh at his remembrance, and flow in holy sympathy with the tears of those who were “Dearer than life to him.”⁸

The poem opens at “The Battleground, near York.” It is evening and, “Sweet sleep the brave, who for their country die! / Around their urn the whisp’ring breeze shall sigh.” Wright had no doubt that in the future, “On that dear spot shall thousands, yet unborn, / Retire to shed the willing tear, and mourn!” He invoked first the heavens, “Spirit of Sympathy! from Heaven descend! / A Nation Weeps!—Columbia mourns a friend!” and called as witnesses “the patriot dead” of the Revolution and others from the recently concluded conflict with Britain.

Pike’s leadership, inspiration, and valor on the battlefield are enshrined in stanzas typical of the entire work:

Unmov’d, the gallant chief beholds the scene,
And mid the battle’s carnage smiles serene!
His noble soul glows with a patriot fire,
His cheering words each noble soul inspire;
The humblest warrior, bent on deeds of fame,
Feels the glad impulse thrill thro’out his frame
Whilst, the bright Eagle hov’ring o’er their heads,
From rank to rank th’infusive ardor spreads.

7. Nathaniel Hill Wright, *The Fall of Palmyra: and Other Poems* (Middlebury, Vt.: William Slade, 1817), 73–89; Wright, *Monody, on the Death of Brigadier General Zebulon Montgomery Pike and Other Poems* (Middlebury, Vt.: Slade and Ferguson, 1814). See also *American Heritage College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002), 899; William Turner Coggeshall, *The Poets and Poetry of the West: With Biographical and Critical Notices* (Columbus, Ohio: Follett, Foster and Co., 1860), 113, at www.wvu.edu/~lawfac/jelkins/lp-2001/wright_n.html.

8. Wright, *The Fall of Palmyra: and Other Poems*, 77–78. All subsequent quotations from Wright’s monody are from this source.

The details of Pike’s death are then recounted. A British magazine explodes and “hurls the pond’rous stones,” mortally wounding Pike. Reflecting opinion at the time, Wright characterized the explosion as British treachery, appending the footnote, “The inhuman conduct of the enemy, here alluded to, must be fresh in the recollection of the public, and need not be recapitulated.” Pike is then carried aboard a ship—“the proud ship its precious freight receives,” and the captured British flag is placed beneath his head—“the well earn’d banner now is spread, / A glorious pillow for a soldier’s head!” In conclusion, Wright called for monuments to Pike’s memory,

Shall not THY COUNTRY some memorial raise?
Some grateful tribute of A NATION’S praise?
Yes! let thy name the marble proudly tell,
Who liv’d in honor and in glory fell.

While monuments to Pike do dot America today, Wright would probably be distressed at how few of them celebrate his patriotism and sacrifice and mourn anew at how Pike has been forgotten as a fallen war hero.

Numerous biographies of Pike appeared in the decades following his death. They usually came bound in volumes also featuring the lives of other heroes of the War of 1812. Examples include R. Thomas’s *The Glory of America, Comprising Memoirs of the Lives and Glorious Exploits of Some of the Distinguished Officers Engaged in the Late War with Great Britain*; James Renwick’s *Lives of Count Rumford, Zebulon Montgomery Pike, and Samuel Gorton*; Charles Jacobs Peterson’s *The Military Heroes of the War of 1812, with a Narrative of the War*; and John S. Jenkins, who wrote *Jackson and the Generals of the War of 1812* and then reworked it as *Daring Deeds of American Generals* and as *The Lives of Distinguished American Generals in the Last War with Great Britain*. These studies appeared in a bewildering number of editions and sometimes with a variation in title. The interest of Americans in these lives evidently remained high, or at least was actively sought by publishers.⁹

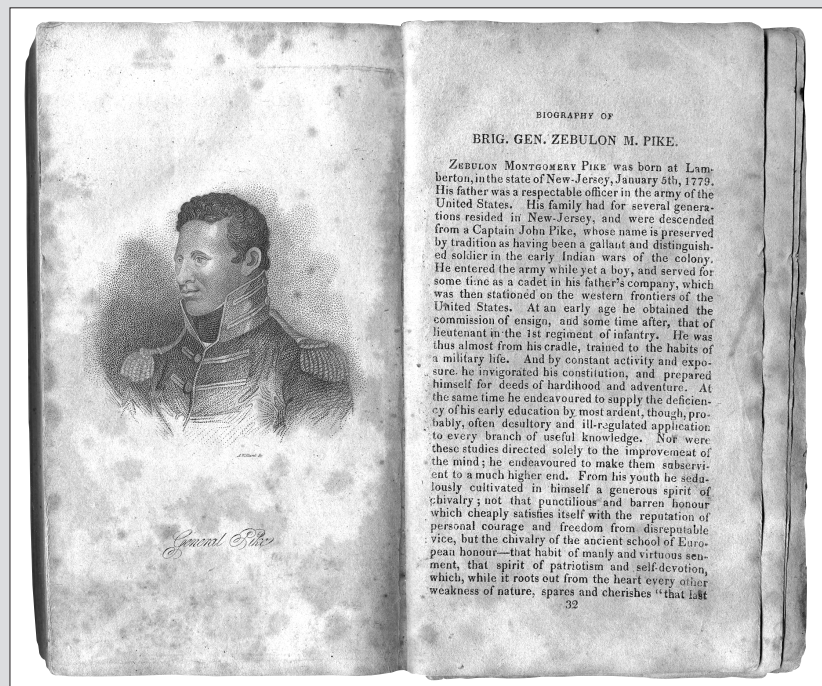
9. R. Thomas, *The Glory of America, Comprising Memoirs of the Lives and Glorious Exploits of Some of the Distinguished Officers Engaged in the Late War with Great Britain* (New York: E. Strong, 1834). Other editions include New York: E. Strong, 1836, 1837, 1843, 1845; Philadelphia: Leary and Getz, 1833, 1836; Hartford: Sumner and Goodman, 1847; Hartford: A. C. Goodman, 1850. James Renwick, *Lives of Count Rumford, Zebulon Montgomery Pike, and Samuel Gorton* (Boston: C.C. Little and J. Brown, 1845); Little and Brown published a subsequent edition in 1848. Charles Jacobs Peterson, *The Military Heroes of the War of 1812, with a Narrative of the War* (Philadelphia: W. A. Leary, 1848); other editions include, Philadelphia: W. A. Leary,

One of the earliest and most effusively titled of the biographies was John M. Niles's *The Life of Oliver Hazard Perry, with an Appendix, Comprising a Biographical Memoir of the Late Captain James Lawrence; with Brief Sketches of the Most Prominent Events in the Lives of Commodores Bainbridge, Decatur, Porter and Macdonough. A List of the Officers of the Navy. To Which Is Added, a Biography of General Pike, and a View of the Leading Events in the Life of General Harrison*. At least there could be no doubt in a buyer's mind as to what he or she was purchasing. Niles, a lawyer and newspaper publisher, founded the *Hartford Times* and also published the *Connecticut Gazetteer* and Rhode Island's *The Independent Whig*. He represented Connecticut in the U.S. Senate for various terms in the 1830s and 1840s and served briefly as postmaster general in 1840.¹⁰

Niles's tribute to Pike is as florid as its title. Cast in the mold of Parson Weems's biography of George Washington, it seeks to instruct as well as praise. For example, of Pike's early years Niles wrote, "From his youth he sedulously cultivated in himself a generous spirit of chivalry, . . . the chivalry of the ancient school of European honor." On the other hand, modern readers might find Niles not too wide of the mark when he said of Pike, "His conduct towards the Indians was marked with equal good sense, firmness, and humanity," and concerning the western expedition, "In the course of this long, toilsome, and perilous march, Pike displayed a degree of personal heroism and hardihood, united with

1849, 1850; Philadelphia: J. B. Smith and Co., 1848, 1858, 1859. John S. Jenkins, *Jackson and the Generals of the War of 1812* (Philadelphia: J. L. Gihon, 1854); a subsequent edition is Philadelphia: J. B. Smith and Co., 1856. John S. Jenkins, *Daring Deeds of American Generals* (New York: A. A. Kelley, 1856); other editions are New York: A. A. Kelley, 1857, 1858. John S. Jenkins, *The Lives of Distinguished American Generals in the Last War with Great Britain* (Auburn, N.Y.: Derby, Miller and Co., 1849); subsequent editions are Auburn, N.Y.: Derby, Miller and Co., 1850, 1851.

10. John M. Niles, *The Life of Oliver Hazard Perry, with an Appendix, Comprising a Biographical Memoir of the Late Captain James Lawrence; with Brief Sketches of the Most Prominent Events in the Lives of Commodores Bainbridge, Decatur, Porter and Macdonough. A List of the Officers of the Navy. To Which Is Added, a Biography of General Pike, and a View of the Leading Events in the Life of General Harrison* (Hartford: William S. Marsh, 1820); a second edition is Hartford: O. D. Cooke, 1821. See also the Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, www.americanpresident.org/history/martinvanburen/cabinet/PostmasterGeneral/JohnMNiles/h_index.shtml.



Numerous biographies of Pike appeared in the decades following his death. Above are pages from one of the earliest, published in 1821. In high-blown rhetoric of the day, author John M. Niles enjoins future generations to remember Pike, imploring, "Gallant Spirit! Thy country will not forget thee; thou shalt have a noble memory."

a sagacity which, had they been exerted on some wide theatre of action, would have done honour to the most renowned general."

Like Nathaniel Wright, Niles commanded the high-blown rhetoric of the day to enjoin future generations to remember and revere Pike, imploring,

Gallant Spirit! Thy country will not forget thee; thou shalt have a noble memory. When a grateful [*sic*] nation confers upon the heroes of Niagara and Erie the laurels they have so nobly earned, she will bid them remember that those laurels were first gathered on the shores of York; and were watered by the blood of a hero; and hereafter, when our children and children's children shall read the story of patriots and heroes who have gallantly fallen in the arms of victory, when their eyes glisten, and their young hearts throb wildly at the kindling theme, they will close the volume which tells of Epaminondas, of Sydney, or of Wolfe, and proudly exclaim, "And we too had our Montgomery and our Pike."¹¹

11. Niles, *Life of Oliver Hazard Perry*, 318, 322, 326, 337.



In late September 1806 Pike and his men held a grand council with the Pawnees at a Pawnee village, where they raised the U.S. flag. Some eager Kansans thought this site to be in Republic County, and in 1901 erected a monument at the location of today's Pawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site (above). It is generally acknowledged, however, that the village Pike visited actually lay farther north, across the Kansas–Nebraska border.

John Jenkins's biography is reflective of all the others that appeared in the 1840s and 1850s. Coming thirty years later than Niles's work, it is equally laudatory but less emotional, more factual, and demonstrates the inevitable loosening of bonds with the passage of time and the older generations. Jenkins began, "This gallant officer . . . was bred in a camp, lived a soldier's life, and died a soldier's death." Pike's poor education—a distress to Pike himself and the bane of readers of his journals—is acknowledged, although Jenkins added, "He possessed an inquiring mind, habits of investigation and reflection, and was a nice observer of men and things." Of Pike's army career, Jenkins observed, "His whole soul was in his profession [. . .]. He panted for action, for glory and fame." He characterized Pike as "active in temperament, enthusiastic, ambitious to excel, and, perhaps, too fond of innovations," and then continued on to recount a story of Pike "drilling his men with snow shoes, in anticipation of a winter campaign in Canada."

In considering Pike's death, Jenkins quoted extensively from the letter Pike wrote to his father the day before he embarked for Canada, a letter that contained the somewhat prophetic phrase, "If success attends my steps, honor and glory await my name; if defeat, still shall it be said that we died like brave men, and conferred honor, even in death, on the American name." Jenkins remarked, "The

hero's wish was gratified. . . . He desired no higher, or greater distinction, in life, than to serve his country in the tented field—he asked no nobler death than that which awaited him, in the hour of his proud triumph." Conspicuously missing from Jenkins's account, given the earlier effusions of Wright and Niles, is the assertion that in the future Americans will make pilgrimages to Pike's grave.¹²

From this point, in the nineteenth century at least, almost nothing more is heard of Pike. He disappeared from the cultural landscape, with one exception. Through popular usage, especially among the fur trappers,

traders, miners, and tourists who came to Colorado over the ensuing decades, Pike became associated with "his" mountain, Pikes Peak. No clear evidence points to if or when it was so officially designated, although John C. Frémont, on his maps and in his reports of his explorations in the Rockies in 1842 and 1844, consistently used the name. The twentieth century, however, witnessed a renewed interest in Pike, sparked in part by the 1906 anniversary of his Southwest Expedition. But unlike the accolades he received in the nineteenth century, Pike was now remembered almost exclusively for his explorations.¹³

States and localities erected a number of monuments to mark Pike's impact on the opening of the American West. Kansas can lay claim to the dedication of one of the first such sites along Pike's western route, although as it turned out the wrong locale was chosen. In late September 1806

12. Jenkins, *Lives of Distinguished American Generals* (1851), 323, 324, 328, 329, 336–37.

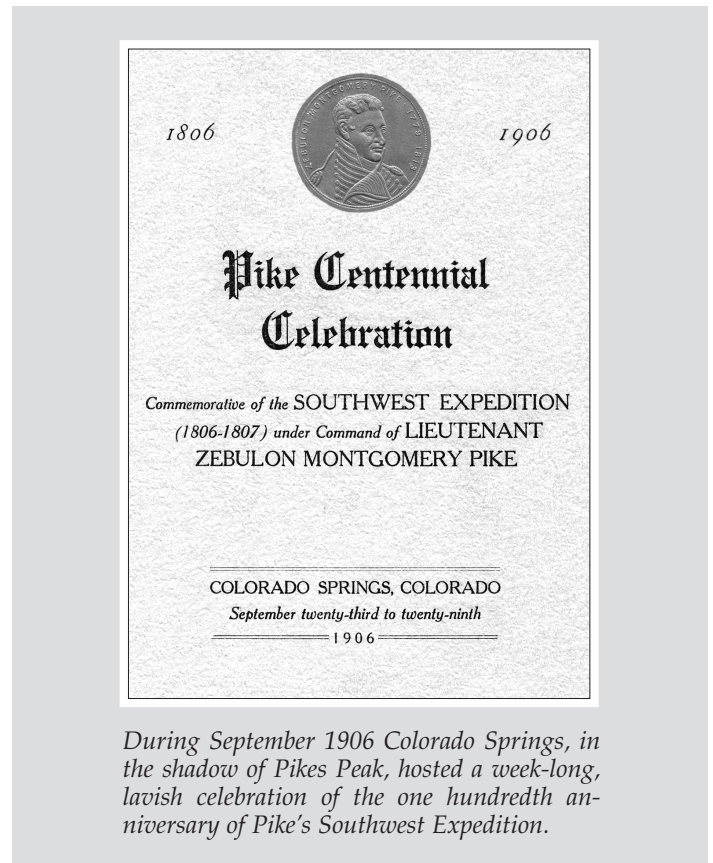
13. The apostrophe in "Pike's" was removed at the instigation of the U.S. Bureau on Geographic Names after 1891, and the Colorado State Legislature in 1978 passed a law requiring the spelling "Pikes Peak." See W. Eugene Hollon, *The Lost Pathfinder, Zebulon Montgomery Pike* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 128; Wikipedia, "Pikes Peak," at www.answers.com/topic/pikes-peak; U.S. Geological Survey at http://interactive2.usgs.gov/faq/list_faq_by_category/get_questions_for_category.asp?category_id=33.

Pike and his men held a grand council with the Pawnees at a Pawnee village. Noting the Spanish flag flying over the village, Pike demanded that it be taken down and a U.S. flag raised in its place. For some eager Kansans, this became the first U.S. flag flown in Kansas. In 1901, at the supposed site in Republic County, a twenty-six-foot-tall granite monolith was placed to mark the event. Today it is generally acknowledged that the Pawnee village Pike visited actually lay farther north, across the Kansas–Nebraska border, near Guide Rock. Nebraska Highway Marker 47 now directs interested travelers to the proper site. A second Kansas monument to Pike is situated near the town of Delphos. Raised in 1962 by the Ottawa County Historical Society, it commemorates Pike’s passage up the Solomon River valley on his way to meet with the Pawnees.¹⁴

Colorado hosts perhaps the greatest number of Pike monuments. In Colorado Springs, the week-long, lavish celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of Pike’s trek through Colorado, presided over by then U.S. Vice President Charles Fairbanks, spurred the dedication of various memorials. Two of the most prominent include a ten-foot-tall, seventeen-ton boulder set up in the city’s Antlers Park and an impressive bronze plaque securely affixed at the summit of Pikes Peak. Each is suitably inscribed. In 1936 the State Historical Society of Colorado reconstructed the stockade Pike and his men built near present Sanford. It was there that Spanish troops found Pike and from which he and his men departed for Santa Fe on February 27, 1807. The city of Pueblo also has honored Pike, creating Pike Plaza as part of its new Historic Arkansas Riverwalk in 2002. The plaza features a plaque dedicated to Pike by the Daughters of the American Revolution, an “interpretive” contemporary sculpture of Pike, and a series of medallions quoting selections from his journal.¹⁵

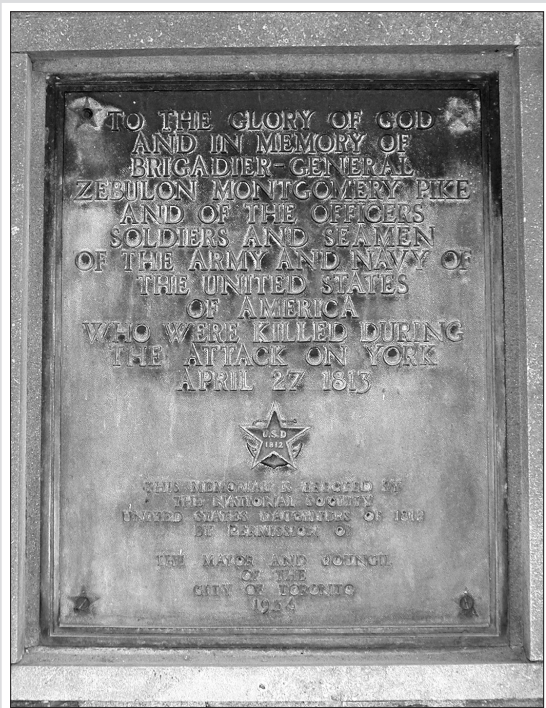
14. The 1901 marker was integrated into Kansas’s Pawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site until 2005, when it was largely destroyed by a tornado. See <http://kansasphototour.com/pawnee.htm>. For the controversy concerning the site of the village, see Anne M. Platoff, “The Pike–Pawnee Flag Incident: Reexamining a Vexillological Legend,” *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology* 6 (1999): 1–8, at <http://aplutoff.home.mindspring.com/flags/pikepawnee.html>. The text of the Nebraska marker can be read at http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/markers/texts/republican_pawnee_village.htm. Information on and photographs of the Delphos marker are at <http://www.kansasphototour.com/pikemon.htm>.

15. For the 1906 festivities in Colorado Springs, which had hilarious and sometimes ludicrous moments, see Nancy E. and Edwin A. Bathke, “The Pike Celebration Centennial 1906,” *Denver Westerners Brand Book* 28 (1972): 265–96. Views of Pike’s stockade are at http://members.tripod.com/%7Emr_sedivy/colorado14.html. Pueblo Riverwalk information is at <http://www.puebloharp.com>; <http://sangres.com/places/pueblo/riverwalk.htm>; Peyton Abbot, “Pueblo’s New Monument to Zebulon M. Pike,” *Wagon Tracks: Santa Fe Trail Association Quarterly* 17 (August 2003): 23.



The most poignant of all Pike markers may be that commissioned in 1934 by the National Society of the United States Daughters of 1812. It stands near the spot where Pike lost his life, at Historic Fort York in Toronto, Canada. It must be one of the few memorials in the world to an enemy combatant on the soil of the injured country. Placed “by permission of the mayor and council of the City of Toronto,” it reads, “To the glory of God and in memory of Brigadier General Zebulon Montgomery Pike and of the officers, soldiers and men of the Army and Navy of the United States of America who were killed during the attack on York, April 27, 1813.” Here is where any tears for Pike might most appropriately be shed—not least because the exact location of his mortal remains is unclear. It is certain that he is buried in the military cemetery at Sackets Harbor, New York, and investigations are under way to attempt to pinpoint which grave is his, but the only marker there is a modest granite monument carrying a small bronze cannon, placed in a far corner. The original wooden monument on the grave had largely deteriorated by 1860 and later disappeared.¹⁶

16. The Daughters of 1812 maintain a Web site at <http://www.us-daughters1812.org>. For information on Pike’s grave, present and past, see



The most poignant of all Pike markers may be the one near the spot where Pike lost his life, at Historic Fort York in Toronto, Canada. It reads, "To the glory of God and in memory of Brigadier General Zebulon Montgomery Pike and of the officers, soldiers and men of the Army and Navy of the United States of America who were killed during the attack on York, April 27, 1813."

Besides monuments, Pike also has been remembered in the twentieth century with various place-names, although not counties and towns, as he was in the nineteenth century. In the 1930s Iowans marked his voyage up the Mississippi River with the creation of Pikes Peak State Park near McGregor in 1935 and with the completion of the Zebulon Pike Lock and Dam at Dubuque in 1937. In Minnesota, Fort Snelling State Park boasts a Pike Island, and Morrison County is home to Zebulon Pike Lake. In Colorado, the U.S. Forest Service established Pike Nation-

al Forest in 1907. Near New Orleans, Louisiana, Fort Pike State Historic Site comprises the extant ruins of fortifications constructed and named for Pike in 1826. Officially abandoned in 1890, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. The Army Corps of Engineers completed Pike Island Locks and Dam on the Ohio River, near Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1963, replacing older corps structures built between 1912 and 1916. Further monuments to Pike will no doubt be unveiled in commemoration of the bicentennial of his Southwest Expedition in 2006.¹⁷

As previously noted, Pike lives on perhaps most vibrantly in literature. Four novels and more than a dozen juvenile accounts of his life and adventures have appeared since 1900. The novels all reflect romantic notions of the American West at the time they were published. The juveniles are of varying content and merit.

The first novel to appear was Robert Ames Bennet's *A Volunteer with Pike, the True Narrative of One Dr. John Robinson and of His Love for the Fair Señorita Vallois*, published in 1909. It is loosely based on the life of Dr. John Robinson who accompanied Pike on his expedition to the Southwest, attached as a civilian physician. Historically, Robinson's ostensible reason for enduring the hardships of the journey was that he carried the claims of one William Morrison, an Illinois businessman, against Baptiste La Lande, who had disappeared with Morrison's goods and was rumored to be in Santa Fe. In reality, General James Wilkinson sent him to spy on the Spanish as part of the plot Wilkinson and Aaron Burr were hatching to create their own empire. A decade later Robinson would join the Mexican army in the revolt against Spanish rule. Eventually, he settled in Natchez, Mississippi, and opened a medical practice.¹⁸

Approximately one third of this novel touches on Pike and his expedition. When it does so it is relatively accurate and informative. Otherwise, it is highly romanticized. The story opens in Washington, D. C., where Robinson has

"Finding Pike: Fort Drum archaeologist searches for general's remains," at http://www.drum.army.mil/sites/postnews/blizzard/blizzard_archive_s/news.asp?id=9&issuedate=10-9-2003; "Village of Sackets Harbor Mayor's Report, Monthly Board Meeting," November 17, 2003; Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1868), at <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~wcarr1/Lossing2/Contents.html> (select ch. 28). Lossing visited Pike's grave in 1855 and again in 1860. His account includes a description and engraving of the deteriorating monument.

17. For Iowa, see www.iowadnr.com/parks/state_park_list/pikes_peak.html; <http://www.dubuquechamber.com/visit/attractions.cfm?Page=AT&Cat=10>. For Minnesota, see <http://brass612.tripod.com/pike.html>, www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html. For Pike National Forest, see Maxine Benson, *1001 Colorado Place Names* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 168. For Fort Pike State Historic Site, see <http://www.crt.state.la.us/crt/parks/fortpike/fortpike.htm>. For Pike Island Locks and Dam, see www.lrp.usace.army.mil/nav/pike.htm.

18. Leroy R. Hafen, *Colorado and Its People: A Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1948), 1:54, 2:388.

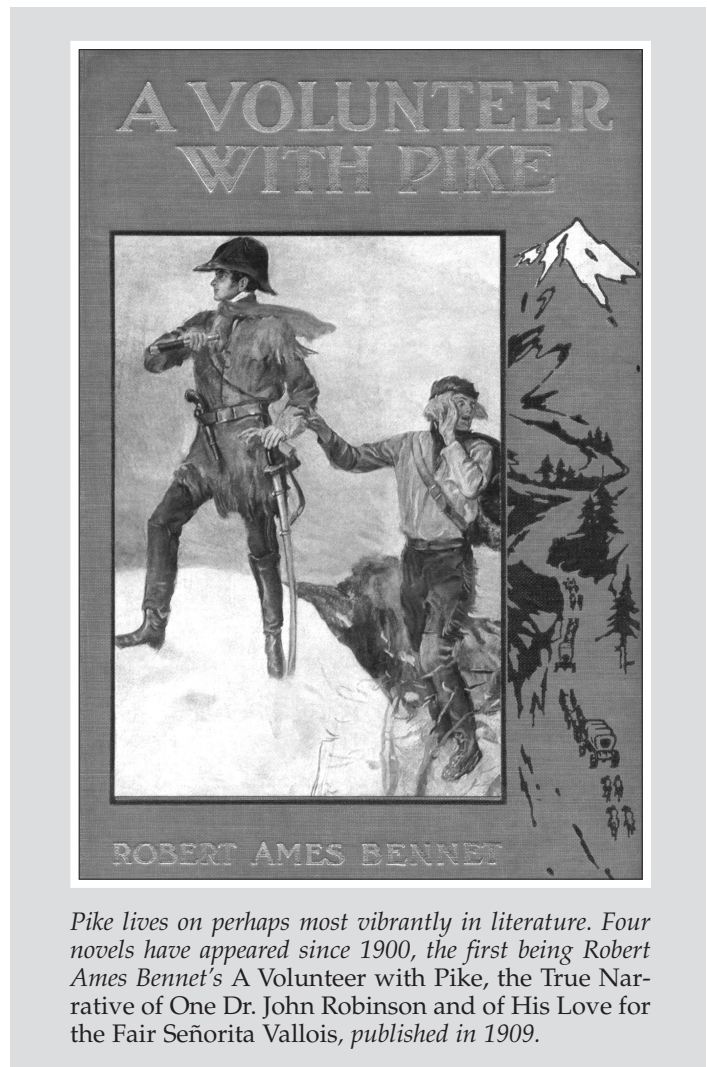
gone to entreat President Jefferson for an appointment to go west with Pike. There he meets Alisandra Vallois, the “fair señorita” of the title. In the course of the book he voyages down the Ohio with the señorita and her uncle; obtains permission to accompany Pike, although he is only mildly interested in the Burr–Wilkinson conspiracy; slogs over the Sangre de Christos hoping to reach Chihuahua, where Alisandra is living with her family; arrives in Chihuahua; fights a duel with a rival for Alisandra’s hand; is escorted to Natchitoches when Pike is returned there; attempts to make his way with the pirate Jean Lafitte to Vera Cruz, Mexico, where, he has learned from a secret message, Alisandra will be awaiting him—she having eluded her family’s attempts to marry her off elsewhere; and is captured by a British warship which just happens to be carrying Señorita Vallois, who naturally has had a few adventures of her own. Love conquers all. Married by the captain of the warship, the pair transfers to a merchant vessel that then, in the words of the novel’s final sentence, “puts into one of the many mouths of the Mississippi, and, ascending in charge of a pilot, landed us at New Orleans, the happiest couple in all the wide world.”¹⁹

Far better than Bennet is Edwin L. Sabin’s *Lost With Lieutenant Pike*, published in 1919. Sabin was a prolific author of both fiction and nonfiction drawing on western events and themes. His *Kit Carson Days* is still in print. He closely adheres to Pike’s journals in writing this novel, although he introduces a young boy, a captive of the Pawnees, as his protagonist. The book’s lengthy subtitle effectively sums up the plot:

How from the Pawnee village the boy named Scar Head marched with the young American chief [Pike] clear into the snowy mountains; how in the dead of winter they searched for the lost river and thought that they had found it; and how the Spanish soldiery came upon them and took them down to Santa Fé of New Mexico, where another surprise awaited them.

The surprise is that Scar Head actually is Jack Pursley, son of a Kentucky fur trapper James Pursley. Here Sabin ingeniously grafts his plot onto the presence in Santa Fe of the historical Kentuckian James Purcell, whom Pike called

19. Robert Ames Bennet, *A Volunteer with Pike: The True Narrative of One Dr. John Robinson and of His Love for the Fair Señorita Vallois* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1909), 453.



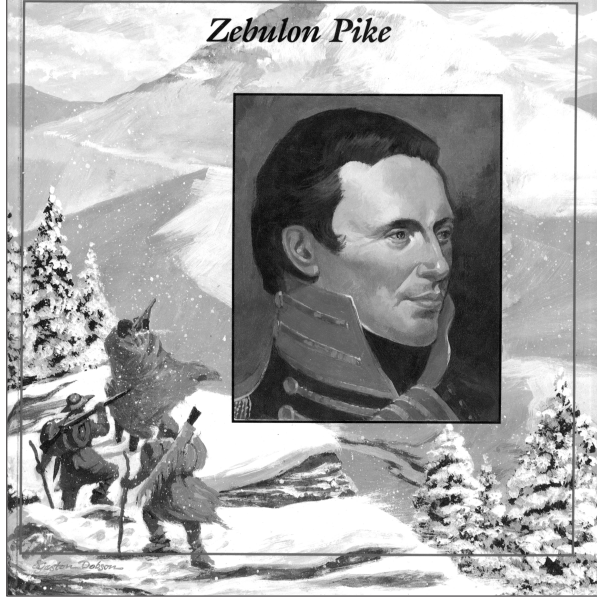
“Pursley” in his journal. Purcell, a fur trapper, trader, and sometime gold prospector, was one of the first Americans to enter New Mexico, going there in 1805 to trade and staying on for nineteen years, making his living as a carpenter. Sabin’s premise is plausible within the confines of his plot, and the story is very entertaining.²⁰

The only other two novels incorporating Pike’s career are Arthur Carhart’s *Drum up the Dawn*, published in 1937, and Richard Woodley’s *Zebulon Pike—Pioneer Destiny*, which appeared in 1982. Carhart was a dedicated conser-

20. The book was published under two titles, *Lost with Lieutenant Pike* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott, 1919); *With Lieutenant Pike* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott, 1919). For information on Sabin, see www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/Bai/jordan2.htm. For Purcell’s story, see Hafen, *Colorado and Its People*, 1:63, 65.

THE WORLD'S GREAT EXPLORERS

Zebulon Pike



The most recent juvenile literature recounting Pike's life usually are part of publishers' series featuring Legendary Heroes of the Wild West, The World's Great Explorers, or Exploring the West, for example. In them, Pike is firmly placed in the first rank of American explorers.

vationist who wrote widely from the 1930s to the 1950s on a variety of environmental topics but also tried his hand at fiction. His novel is concerned primarily with the fate of William Meek, one of Pike's most trusted and supportive men. Meek did not return to the United States with Pike, having killed his fellow soldier and friend, Theodore Miller, in Chihuahua. The Spanish held him there until 1820. Woodley's *Pioneer Destiny* is one of a number of fictional works in the publisher's *American Explorers Series*. For action it adheres closely to Pike's journal, reading much like the journal with dialogue added. In the usual vein of such action-packed Westerns, a romantic element is introduced, with General Wilkinson attempting to seduce Clarissa, Pike's wife, and Pike falling for the inevitable raven-haired señorita in Santa Fe. None of the novels with Pike as the hero follows his career to its end by using his role in the War of 1812 and his death as part of its plot.²¹

21. A precise glimpse of Pike's men and their lives is Donald Jackson, "Zebulon Pike's Damned Rascals," *Occasional Papers No. 1* (Colorado

The juvenile accounts of Pike's life have a curious publishing history. Only two appeared before 1950, *The Boy's Story of Zebulon Pike, Explorer of the Great Southwest*, which despite its title also considers Pike's Mississippi River explorations, and *As The Crow Flies*, which dramatizes Pike's relationship with the Indians on the upper Mississippi. Of the others, six have publication dates in the 1950s and 1960s. Then there is a gap of two decades, with six more available since 1990. Most of the earlier volumes follow the pattern of Augusta Stevenson's *Zeb Pike, Boy Traveler* (1950) in that they simplify and dramatize Pike's boyhood, depicting the hardships of his frontier existence as preparation for his later deeds. Several also portray his death in the solemn tones of the nineteenth century.

All of the most recent books aimed at elementary and secondary school students focus exclusively on Pike's explorations, with emphasis on the Southwest Expedition. His death is treated almost as a footnote to his exploits. All but one are part of publishers' series featuring *Legendary Heroes of the Wild West*, *The World's Great Explorers*, or *Exploring the West*, for example. Most are solidly researched and handsomely illustrated. Through them, for the first time in popular literature as opposed to the academic realm, Pike is firmly placed in the first rank of American explorers. In this instance, at least, his reputation has never stood higher.²²

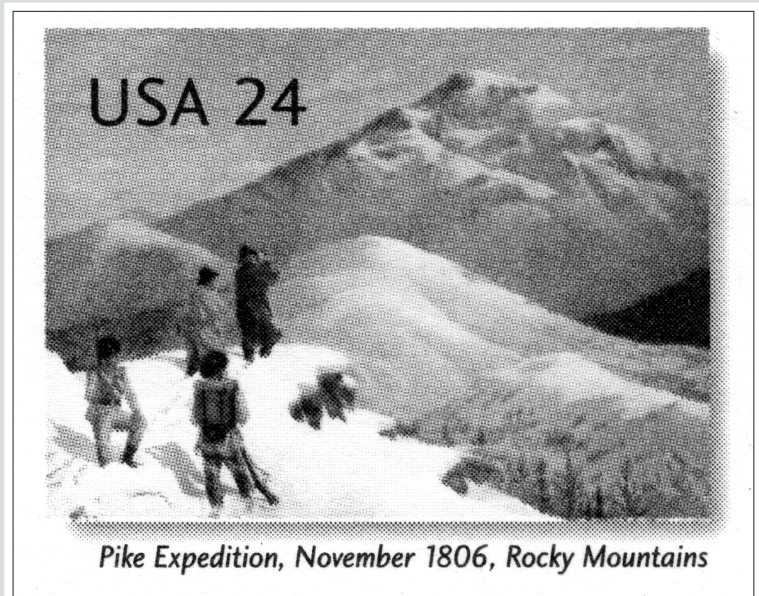
Pike's heritage has also been promoted in other popular, although somewhat ephemeral or fugitive, forms. A va-

Spring: Pikes Peak Posse of the Westerners, 1979); Arthur Carhart, *Drum up the Dawn* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1937); Richard Woodley, *Zebulon Pike, Pioneer Destiny*, (Wayne, Pa.: Banbury Books, 1982).

22. The following are ranked in order of first publication date: Mary Gay Humphries, ed. *The Boy's Story of Zebulon Pike, Explorer of the Great Southwest* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911); Cornelia Meigs, *As The Crow Flies* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927); Faith Yingling Knoop, *Zebulon Pike* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Co., 1950); Augusta Stevenson, *Zeb Pike, Boy Traveler* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953) (part of the publisher's "Childhood of Famous Americans" series); Nina Brown Baker, *Pike of Pike's Peak* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1953); Leonard Wibberly, *Zebulon Pike: Soldier and Explorer* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1961); Howard Stanley Aronson, *Zeb Pike* (San Antonio: Naylor Co., 1963); Bern Keating, *Zebulon Pike: Young America's Frontier Scout* (New York: H. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965); Susan Sinnot, *Zebulon Pike* (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1990) (part of the publisher's "The World's Great Explorers" series); Jared Stallones, *Zebulon Pike and the Explorers of the American Southwest* (New York: Chelsea House, 1992) ("World Explorers" Series); William R. Sanford and Carl R. Green, *Zebulon Pike, Explorer of the Southwest* (Springfield, N.J.: Enslow, 1996) ("Legendary Heroes of the Wild West" series); Charles W. Maynard, *Zebulon Pike, Soldier-Explorer of the American Southwest* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2003); Barbara Witteman, *Zebulon Pike: Soldier and Explorer* (Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2003) ("Let Freedom Ring—Exploring the West" series); Patricia Calvert, *Zebulon Pike, Lost in the Rockies* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2005) ("Great Explorations" series).

riety of medals depicting Pike have been struck, beginning in 1906 in conjunction with the one-hundredth anniversary celebrations of the Southwest Expedition. The Franklin Mint, Danbury Mint, and International Geographical Union followed suit, with most examples being offered in the 1970s. In 1984 a well-scripted and produced documentary video entitled *Zebulon Pike and the Blue Mountain* was released. It highlights Pike's path in Colorado, and it won a Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History. Pike aficionados and children of all ages today can even go "geocaching" for Pike, via an Internet Web site directing users to points in Colorado Springs, Colorado. But the most unique popular artifact of Pike has to be the June 1941 issue of *True Comics*. It carried a feature entitled *Frontier Fighters: Zebulon Pike*—a full color, seven-page account of Pike's two expeditions in classic comic book format. It is interesting that this was only the second issue of *True Comics* and why Pike's story was chosen is not known. Daniel Boone was featured as a "frontier fighter" in the following August issue and that was the end of the series, such as it was.²³

23. For the 1906 commemorative medal, see Bathke, "The Pike Celebration," 278–82. A number of the medals can be viewed on line; see especially http://www.skyrunner.com/story/pp_medals.htm. The difficult-to-find documentary video was produced by John Henry Johnson and narrated by Burgess Meredith, with musical score by Neil Argo. The geocaching site is at http://www.geocaching.com/track/track_detail.asp?ID=10682. The *True Comics* issue is available on line at <http://digital.lib.msu.edu/collections/index.cfm?action=view&TitleID=57&Format=gif>



As the country celebrates the two-hundredth anniversary of Pike's Southwest Expedition, popular culture may reflect a renewal of interest in Pike's feats. In January 2006 the U.S. Post Office issued a stamped postcard (above) to recognizing the Pike bicentennial.

As the country celebrates the two-hundredth anniversary of Pike's Southwest Expedition, it is evident that Pike's place in American popular culture is secure. It might astonish his nineteenth-century admirers that he is remembered more for his explorations up the Mississippi and to the Southwest than for his death in battle. Old soldiers truly do fade away and in that sense Pike "peaked" long ago. For most Americans today, Pike's memory and reputation are irrevocably tied to the mountain bearing his name. Somewhat ironically, Pike secured his fame not with his heroic death but when, on November 15, 1806, he spotted a "small blue cloud"—Pikes Peak—on the western horizon. For the tens of thousands ^{KH}

tourists who ascend Pikes Peak annually and who gaze east to the Great Plains and west to the serrated ranks of the Rockies, Pike is and remains one of the great explorers of the American West.